## United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

July 26, 2017

Ulitsa Trudovykh reservov 125 Federal Institution Penal Colony 17 Administration of the Federal Corrective Service of Russia of Kirovskaya oblast Omutninsk Kirovskaya oblast 612700 Russia

Bagir,

I write recognizing that this letter never may reach you. Through my position as a Commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), I have become aware of your dire situation and have resolved to dedicate my efforts to securing your unconditional release from prison.

You and your fellow Muslims studied Said Nursi, an Islamic commentator who called for Islam to be modernized. Said Nursi rejected hatred and violence. Yet the Russian government, because officials believe that your peaceful practices threaten national security and pose a cultural and physical threat to Russia, denied you your freedom. In February 2015, you were accused under the Criminal Code of recruiting a "terrorist" cell of Nursi followers and sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment.

The Russian government accused you of participating in extremist activity, which you have not. They accused you of founding a terror cell, which you did not. And they believe that your beliefs pose an existential threat to Russia, which they do not.

What you have done is peacefully follow the dictates of your conscience. Yet the Russian government surveils, investigates, and prosecutes you and many of your fellow Nursi readers for alleged extremism despite no link to such activities. And because of that you have lost your freedom.

Bagir, you have my support and the support of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. My colleagues and I will continue to highlight your case, and hope to meet you as a free man in the very near future.

Sincerely,

John Ruskay